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Goodreads

Social Media Meets
 Readers Advisory



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SEARCHER'S
 VOICE

The Top 10 Alternative Sources for Goodreads

Many libraries are now using existing social media systems for book recommendations as a way to engage with their users and move into the new work of social book recommendation. A quick poll of information professionals, who have decided to look beyond Goodreads for some good reads, brings up some interesting options. Here are the top suggestions from the pros.

Bookish

bookish.com/home

This is a new, widely hyped project of three well-known publishers, hoping to more directly connect authors and readers through their publishers. “Bookish taps the expertise of authors, their editors and their publishers to find you the best reads. Tell us which books you like and we’ll show you more like them.”

BookLikes

booklikes.com

It has the same look and feel as Goodreads and allows for similar functions in organizing, sharing, and rating books with a strong social sensibility. “BookLikes gathers book lovers, book bloggers, reviews, writers and avid readers from all over the world who can share their reviews and other writings, reading updates

and find other interesting blogs, writers and avid readers.”

i09 Book Club

io9.com/tag/io9-book-club

“io9 is a daily publication that covers science, science fiction, and the future.” Its book club operates as an online book discussion that often includes the book’s author as well.

IndieBRAG*.bragmedallion.com*

“We represent a group of people who are passionate about reading self-published or ‘indie’ books. We call ourselves the Book Readers Appreciation Group ... Our mission is to recognize quality on the part of authors who self-publish both print and digital books ... The readers judge the merits of the books based on our proprietary list of criteria. The single most important criterion that we ask our readers to use in judging a book is whether or not they would recommend it to their best friend. Once a book meets this standard of quality, we award it our B.R.A.G. Medallion, and along with other medallion recipients, it is presented on this website.”

LibraryThing*librarything.com*

“LibraryThing is an online service to help people catalog their books easily. You can access your catalog from anywhere—even on your mobile phone. Because everyone catalogs together, LibraryThing also connects people with the same books, comes up with suggestions for what to read next, and so forth. ... LibraryThing is a full-powered cataloging application, searching the Library of Congress, all five national Amazon sites, and more than 690 world libraries. You can edit your information, search and sort it, ‘tag’ books with your own subjects, or use the Library of Congress and Dewey systems to organize your collection. You can check out other people’s libraries, see who has the most similar library to yours, swap reading suggestions and so forth. LibraryThing also makes book recommendations based on the collective intelligence of the other libraries.”

Riffle*rifflebooks.com*

Just released, it relies on using existing Facebook Likes and your friends’ Likes to form the core of your recommendations. Once Goodreads was purchased, Riffle began to adjust its design to allow for reviews and

ratings and other social aspects. The system has editors in 23 categories to help guide content and is actively working to get content. The site has a Pinterest or Twitter feel to it, but it appears to be evolving rather quickly.

The Reading Room*thereadingroom.com*

“Local and independent but also global and social ... The Reading Room.com aims to provide readers with a trusted community in which you can access good book recommendations, read the latest book reviews from respected sources such as The New York Times, and discover new writers, latest releases and best sellers.” Free registration is required to enter into this book community, which is organized much like Goodreads, with clubs, bookshelves, book reviews, author interviews, options for connecting to booksellers, and the ability to log your reading and manage your bookshelf.

Thin Reads*www.thinreads.com*

“Thin Reads features original reviews of ebook singles, interviews and profiles of authors writing ebook singles, and news and commentary about the ebook single market including an exclusive weekly analysis of the best-selling fiction and non-fiction ebook singles sold at Amazon. Thin Reads also features its own database of more than 600 ebook singles available dating back to 2010. The database includes title, publication date, publisher, author, description, length, and retail platform.”

What Should I Read Next?*whatshouldireadnext.com*

“The latest version of WSIRN relaunched in August 2012. The major new features are the ability to create more than one booklist, so you can manage books in whatever way you like (and share them with other people), and ... a responsive, mobile-friendly version of the site. You can now import a whole list of ISBN numbers from a web page or a comma-

separated file. ... Our system has no commercial agenda at all (though you can buy the recommended items through Amazon, of course), and is purely based on items that real people actually like.”

YourNextRead*yournextread.com/us*

“At YourNextRead we only feature books you have told us you have read, enjoyed and recommended for others to read ... Search for a book you have already enjoyed and we will give you other people’s book recommendations. There should be quite a few book recommendations to go through and each one has descriptions and reviews from Amazon and Goodreads (with more to come in the future).”

Other noteworthy, but still too new to evaluate, options include a new startup currently in development, **Valioo**, which is looking for beta testers. If you’re interested, the contact information is scan.valioo.com. **Hunch**, a relative newcomer (hunch.com), is owned by eBay. “Hunch’s ambitious mission is to build a ‘Taste Graph’ of the entire web, connecting every person on the web with their affinity for anything, from books to electronic gadgets to fashion or vacation spots. Hunch is at the forefront of combining algorithmic machine learning with user-curated content, with the goal of providing better recommendations for everyone.”

ThirdScribe (thirdscribe.com) is still in beta but intends to be a “book based social network dedicated to helping readers and authors connect” around books. It aims to offer “the ability to follow your authors across all social media in one place, filtered out from all of the noise. You can like and get information on any book or series, interact with the authors, and share your experiences. Book discussions take place at the book page, not spread out across a hundred different site wide forum threads. Write reviews right there at the book page, and you can access other reviews from across the web right there as well.” There are others, but these are some of the best.

Amazon's History of Acquisition

Although Amazon supports internal R&D on products, services and infrastructure, it has been noteworthy for the degree of acquisition used to build the company. The company has tens of billions of dollars at its disposal to buy the technologies, software, or companies that it needs to bolster its position. The recent acquisition of Goodreads is just the latest in a long line of acquisitions that have been key to its growth and development. Here's just a partial list of some relevant purchases.

Bookpages & Telebook

April 1998

At the time of acquisition, Britain's Bookpages and Germany's Telebook were two leading online booksellers in their countries. No longer separate entities, the sites became the foundation of Amazon's online presence in the U.K. (amazon.co.uk) and Germany (www.amazon.de).

PlanetAll.com

August 1998

Acquiring Sage Enterprises gave Amazon access to a successful suite of calendaring features—including notifications and “key e-commerce related features of PlanetAll.com [which were] into our main site at Amazon.com,” Bezos noted in his announcement of the purchase. “PlanetAll is the most innovative use of the Internet I've seen. It's simply a breakthrough in doing something as fundamental and important as staying in touch. The reason PlanetAll has over 1.5 million members—and is growing even faster than the Internet—is simple: It creates extraordinary value for its users. I believe PlanetAll will prove to be one of the most important online applications” (phx.corporate-ir.net/phoenix.zhtml?c=97664&p=irol-newsArticle&ID=233831&highlight=).

Junglee Corporation

August 1998

California-based Junglee gave Amazon “the leading provider of advanced Web-based virtual database (VDB) technology that can help shoppers find millions of products on the Internet.” Listing both Junglee and Amazon reviews of products, this India-focused “online product comparison and advertising site” is still listed in beta mode.

Bibliofind

1999

Acquired with the purchase of the company Exchange.com. “Bibliofind has combined with Amazon.com to provide millions of rare, used, and out-of-print books through the world's No.1 online bookstore. Search for millions of hard-to-find titles from our trusted community of Bibliofind and Amazon.com booksellers” (<http://www.amazon.com/Bibliofind-com/b?ie=UTF8&node=299899011>). The Bibliofind acquisition proved to be very controversial, with one analyst asking, “Does it seem entirely unlikely that Amazon had bought Bibliofind in 1999 firstly to extract \$185 million from its IPO shareholders and pass this to its insiders, secondly to ‘steal’ the customer's of Bibliofind's bookdealers for its fledgling used book marketplace

and thirdly having done that, for the purpose of shutting the site down to increase its own market share now at 15% commission and \$40 a month listing fees as opposed to Bibliofind's flat \$25 a month?” (“Amazon and Bibliofind: A History,” Brian Cassidy, Book Patrol, Aug. 19, 2008; <http://www.bookpatrol.net/2008/08/amazon-and-bibliofind-history.html#.UX36wdeYN1Y>).

Alexa Internet

April 1999

Gave Amazon access to a well-developed, “free advertising-supported Web navigation service that works with Internet browsers to provide useful information about the sites being viewed and suggest related sites” [phx.corporate-ir.net/phoenix.zhtml?c=97664&p=irol-newsArticle_Print&ID=232864&highlight=].

Leep Technology

1999

Now operated as an Amazon subsidiary, Leep developed tools and patents for database queries and Customer Relationship Management.

Egghead.com

2001

Having acquired Egghead's URL and intellectual property assets (including customer data) in bankruptcy court,

Amazon sought to relaunch Egghead's website; however, the URL and service has since been incorporated into the larger Amazon site.

Joyo.com

2004

At the time of acquisition, Joyo was the largest online entertainment retailer in China. In announcing the purchase, Amazon noted that "through this acquisition, Amazon.com will blend Joyo.com's expertise in serving the Chinese market with Amazon.com's experience as one of the world's leading online retailers. This combination will allow Joyo.com to improve its customer experience and grow its business" (phx.corporate-ir.net/phoenix.zhtml?c=97664&p=irol-newsArticle&ID=605325&highlight=). The site now operates as Amazon's Chinese portal at amazon.cn.

BookSurge, LLC

2005

"A global leader in inventory-free book printing and fulfillment ... [with] a catalog of thousands of titles that can be printed on-demand and are available for sale on Amazon.com" (<http://phx.corporate-ir.net/phoenix.zhtml?c=97664&p=irol-newsArticle&ID=691258&highlight=>).

Brilliance Audio, Inc.

2007

"The largest independent publisher of audiobooks in the United States. The acquisition will enable Amazon to work closely with the book publishing community to further expand the number of books produced in audio format and provide customers with an even greater selection of audiobooks to find, discover and buy" (phx.corporate-ir.net/phoenix.zhtml?c=176060&p=irol-newsArticle&ID=1006035&highlight=).

Audible.com

2008

"The leading provider of spoken audio information and entertainment on the Internet. Through its websites in the U.S. and U.K. and alliances in Germany and France, Audible offers over 80,000

programs, including audiobooks and other spoken word content from more than 520 content partners that include leading audiobook publishers, broadcasters, entertainers, magazine and newspaper publishers, and business information providers" (phx.corporate-ir.net/phoenix.zhtml?c=176060&p=irol-newsArticle&ID=1120199&highlight=).

Shelfari

2008

This left many complaining that once Amazon got hold of customer data and system, it left the website with no effort to maintain or improve the site. However, Shelfari officials were looking forward to the new alliance in announcing the deal: "With more resources and Amazon's expertise in building a platform where people come to share ideas, there are a lot of new opportunities in the future that will benefit each of you. In the meantime, you'll continue to have access to the great community and tools that you've always known and used on the site" ("Shelfari Joins the Amazon.com Family," Aug. 25, 2008; blog.shelfari.com/my_weblog/2008/08/shelfari-joins-the-amazoncom-family.html). Was this a bad deal? Had the website just reached its Peter Principle? Or was Shelfari just outdone by competition from Goodreads and others?

AbeBooks

2008

The acquisition of AbeBooks resulted in a web of interesting relationships, since AbeBooks included at least partial ownership in a variety of websites and services, including Bookfinder.com, Chrislands, FillZ, Gojaba.com, IberLibro.com, Justbooks and a 40% stake in LibraryThing. "AbeBooks is an online marketplace for books, with over 110 million primarily used, rare and out-of-print books listed for sale by thousands of independent booksellers from around the world," Amazon noted in its press release. "AbeBooks will continue to function as a stand-alone operation based in Victoria, British Columbia.

AbeBooks will maintain all its web sites, including its Canadian web site. The web sites will continue to have country-specific content, such as reviews of Canadian-authored books and interviews of Canadian writers" (phx.corporate-ir.net/phoenix.zhtml?c=176060&p=irol-newsArticle&ID=1231146&highlight=).

Lexcycle's Stanza

2009

This app for reading ebooks and other digital publications was once considered the best ebook program that crossed platforms and attracted more than 4 million downloads. Once purchased by Amazon, promised improvements never materialized, and after months of no updates to the Lexcycle homepage in 2011, the website became defunct. Although the product is still available for downloads, its usability is greatly diminished.

Amie Street

2010

This social music site began in 2007 and included such innovative features as the ability of individual artists to sell their music; demand/popularity-focused, algorithm-based pricing efforts (which kept prices low yet competitive); and significant social networking including the support of various causes. Its Fantasy Record Label app through Facebook allowed users to dream up their own albums of favorite songs and to share these picks with others. Amazon was one of the initial venture capital sources, eventually gaining control of the site, and in 2010 announced that all sales would be redirected to Amazon and the site would be discontinued.

Yap

2011

This voice-recognition maker was acquired by Amazon just months before Apple introduced the latest Apple phone with Siri-powered voice controls. As with other below-the-radar acquisitions, Amazon never publicly commented on or even confirmed Yap's acquisition (cltblog.com/23836).

IVONA Software*January 2013*

This text-to-speech software company's acquisition was explained by Amazon as "world-class technologies that power the "Text-to-Speech," "Voice Guide," and "Explore by Touch" features on Kindle Fire tablets" (www.ivona.com/en/news/amazoncom-announces-acquisition-of-ivona-software).

Evi*Within the last year*

In April 2013, reports surfaced that sometime in the past year, Amazon had very quietly acquired the company and its voice recognition app (also based on Nuance software) potentially for either an upgrade to Kindle or a future smartphone product ("Sources Say Amazon Acquired Siri-Like Evi for \$26M—Is a Smartphone Coming?" Mike Butcher, TechCrunch, April 17, 2013; techcrunch.com/2013/04/17/sources-say-amazon-acquired-siri-like-evi-app-for-26m-is-a-smartphone-coming).

Goodreads*March 2013*

Given the space since the last major book-oriented acquisition—and the

reported size of Goodreads—this buy was widely covered in the media. With 16 million members—a number that has doubled in just the past year—who have 525 million books lining their online bookshelves and have written more than 23 million reviews, this is clearly a treasure trove for Amazon. Goodreads has become the clear leader for peer recommendations and social cataloging in its 6 years of existence, even though many question the veracity of the reported numbers.

A SHY SUITOR?

Compiling this listing wasn't easy. Amazon is notably shy about some of its corporate activities, with many of these events missing from Amazon's own corporate timelines, archived press releases, and other avenues. Many competitors contacted for this article stressed the controlling impact that Amazon has, using acquisition to fuel growth and change, using its deep pockets (more than \$32 billion is available cash) to buy what it needs or what appears to be a potential competitor in its increasing dominance in all things online.

And this adds to the image of Amazon à la WalMart, as a giant vacuum cleaner

sucking all of the potential opportunities and innovations to stave off competition. However, even that perception is now under scrutiny. A recent 63-page study from JP Morgan Stanley finds, "Retailers need to act faster, source margin, and the war for the last mile is on. But many are moving forward, so incremental share will be more difficult for Amazon to take than it has been. We believe we are in the early stages of a positive shift in the market's perception of the Amazon threat" ("Big Box Retail: The Reports of Its Death Are Greatly Exaggerated; Retail Can Thrive in an AMZN World," <https://markets.jpmorgan.com/research/EmailPubServlet?action=open&hashCode=-gdnkrml&doc=GPS-1105378-0>).

So, what future is there for Goodreads as an independent, unbiased social network for book lovers? No one knows for sure, but Amazon's history with Stanza, Amie Street, Shelfari, and others isn't promising. On the other hand, Amazon's purchase of DP Review (dpreview.com) in 2007, a site known for quality information on digital photography and digital cameras, hasn't resulted in any decrease in quality or perspective for the publication, which remains an independent voice for photographers. Time will tell.

A Sampling of Libraries and Colleges Using Goodreads

Albion College**Stockwell-Mudd Library**

goodreads.com/user/show/5840798-albion-college

Alfred University**Herrick Memorial Library**

goodreads.com/group/show/24841-herrick-memorial-library-alfred-university

Anne Arundel County**Public Library**

goodreads.com/group/show/93516-anne-arundel-county-public-library

Hartsville (SC) Memorial Library

goodreads.com/group/show/98537-hartsville-memorial-library-reading-challenge

Topeka & Shawnee Co. Public Library

goodreads.com/group/show/50549-topeka-shawnee-co-public-library

Wellington (NZ)**City Libraries**

goodreads.com/group/show/82434-wellington-reads

Sacramento Public Library

goodreads.com/group/show/87232-sacramento-public-library

University of Utah Chapter of Pi Alpha Alpha

goodreads.com/group/show/94496-u-of-u-mpa-mpp-book-club

Leeds University Book Club

goodreads.com/group/show/102365-leeds-university-book-club

NYC Cornellians Book Club

goodreads.com/group/show/95796-nyc-cornellians-book-club

University of Waterloo Book Club

goodreads.com/group/show/26145-university-of-waterloo-book-club

Klai Juba Architecture and Landscape Architecture Library (NDSU)

goodreads.com/group/show/100247-klai-juba-architecture-and-landscape-architecture-library

University of Auckland Book Club

goodreads.com/group/show/96194-university-of-auckland-book-club

Weber State University English Department

goodreads.com/group/show/98233-wsu-english-department

University of St. Thomas Graduate Programs in Software Book Club

goodreads.com/group/show/32992-software-engineering

Seton Hill University's Writing Popular Fiction MFA program

goodreads.com/group/show/50585-seton-hill-writers

Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski (Bulgaria)

goodreads.com/group/show/16055-sofia-university-st-kliment-ohridski

Harvard University

goodreads.com/group/show/72822-harvard-university

Some Cool Tools for Keeping Up

Here are some examples of services that have arisen that can even enhance the practice of information professionals keeping up with the flood of new information, literature, and knowledge:

Publishing Trends

The Staff Recommends (thestaffrecommends.com) gets books from publishers and “if and only if we decide we like a book and want to feature it on The Staff Recommends, then publishers pay us to have their book featured here. We choose the books we like, and only then does money change hands. If we don’t like it, it will not appear on The Staff Recommends. ... All books on The Staff Recommends must pass muster with our editor and ombudsman, John Warner. All recommendations on The Staff Recommends are written by John and his team of readers.”

Thin Reads (thinreads.com) “features original reviews of ebook singles, interviews and profiles of authors writing ebook singles, and news and commentary about the ebook single market including an exclusive weekly analysis of the best-selling fiction and non-fiction ebook singles sold at Amazon. Thin Reads also features its own database of more than 600 ebook singles available dating back to 2010. The database includes title, publication date, publisher, author, description, length, and retail platform.”

Whichbook (openingthebook.com/whichbook) notes: “Every title on Whichbook has been read by one of a changing team of 70 people who are drawn from libraries and literature organisations and come together to share training to create the entries. The ratings and comments are created by real readers who care about books. In choosing titles for the site, we concentrate on the books people won’t find by them-

selves and go for the widest range possible. Books must be fiction or poetry, written or translated into English and published in the last 10 years. We don’t include the biggest best-sellers as everyone knows about them already (though sometimes we’ll have added a book before it became a bestseller!) We do include lots of intriguing and less well-known titles.”

Wowbrary (wowbrary.org) “was created to make public libraries more visible and accessible to everyone. Wowbrary regularly informs you by email and/or RSS about your chosen public library’s newest books, movies and music. We make it easy for you to browse through the latest additions and place a hold on a new title. This is a free user service supported by grants, donations, sponsorships, book sale commissions and volunteers. ... We cover libraries serving 44 million people across the U.S., and we’re expanding to more libraries. ... Wowbrary is a project of Interactive Sciences, Inc., a California nonprofit 501(c)(3) public-benefit corporation that uses technology to help with social needs.”

Get Your Galleys Online

Netgalley (<https://netgalley.com>) is an “innovative and easy-to-use online service and connection point for book publishers, reviewers, media, librarians, booksellers, bloggers and educators.” Free registration is required. Although most professionals already have direct connections to major publishers in their areas, Netgalley is building a strong reputation and is worth a good look for finding little-known or

smaller publishers. With the rise of self-publishing and the explosion of indie presses, this is filling a need. Netgalley sells itself to publishers as a marketing tool that protects their intellectual content for a fee—which has been criticized by smaller presses in the past. Today, it offers a variety of publisher marketing options and claims to serve more than 80,000 registered “professional readers.”

Getting on a Virtual Book Tour Bus

Another interesting approach is to follow book tours through sites such as **Bewitching Book Tours** (bewitchingbooktours.blogspot.com), which is “geared towards the new author, the ebook author, the small and independent press author, and the mid-list author—the author who doesn’t have a huge marketing budget but wants the most bang for their promotional buck.” They work by “pairing authors and their books with targeted book bloggers and readers who enjoy the types of books the authors write.” Although this service is focused on romance, paranormal, and related genres, this is an interesting new twist for connecting to authors on tour or for picking up on upcoming hot spikes in reader interest.

Covering the Publishing Industry

Any librarian knows the value of *Publishers Weekly*, *Choice*, *New York Review of Books*, and *Library Journal* for quick advance notices of upcoming titles or coverage of trends in the industry. **Shelf Awareness** (shelf-awareness.com) is a “free e-newsletter about books and the book industry,” offering a solid alternative to fee-based services in two versions: a reader version that covers the “25 best books coming out this week as selected by our industry insiders,” and another daily

version geared to book trade professionals. Written and operated by industry professionals, both editions are a good read—traditional formats (reviews, news, commentary)—but worth considering for keeping up-to-date.

Reviewing the Best of the Self-Published

BlueInk Review (blueinkreviews.com) provides intelligent, “serious reviews of self-published books,” filling a much-needed gap in coverage from traditional sources. “BlueInk aims to become the gold standard in reviews of self-published work. In the process, we bring to this ever-expanding world a user-friendly online experience that offers a bridge to larger distribution for titles that merit such attention.” Financial terms are a bit troubling: Self-published authors pay \$395 to get their book reviewed within 7 to 9 weeks and \$495 to get it reviewed within 4 to 5 weeks; authors can choose not to have their reviews displayed on the Blue Ink Review website if they are negative. Another excellent new resource for self-published works is **ForeWord Reviews** (<https://forewordreviews.com>), which offers a similar fee-based review system. *Kirkus* and *Publishers Weekly* have separate programs within their organizations with a similar deal: Paying standard service, \$425; express service, \$575 at *Kirkus* for reviews; or approximately \$400–500 for your self-published book to be reviewed. They guarantee books will be read but not that you will like what they have to say about it. Reviewers are carefully chosen, and the selection and breadth of titles make these must-reads.

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